



THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE

Reforming Ohio's Education Bureaucracy to Put Students First

Interested Party Testimony
Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Ohio Senate Bill 178

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As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding Ohio Senate Bill 178.

My name is Greg R. Lawson. I am a research fellow at **The Buckeye Institute**, an independent research and educational institution—a think tank—whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

State, local, and **business** leaders have long complained that Ohio’s education system does not sufficiently prepare high school graduates for the workforce, leaving employers without skilled employees and many young people without the knowledge they need to earn a living, afford a house, or support a family. Senate Bill 178 pursues reforms that should help.

The Ohio Constitution **requires** a State Board of Education, but it leaves the selection of members and the enumeration of its powers and duties up to the General Assembly. Currently, the nineteen-member board is comprised of voter-elected members and several gubernatorial appointees. It enjoys a **broad purview** over a range of issues such as academic standards, instructional materials, school buildings, transportation, and administrative responsibilities. Unfortunately, the board’s hybrid composition and extensive responsibilities have hindered its responsiveness and effectiveness in a rapidly changing environment. More than 16 months have lapsed, for example, since the last state superintendent announced retirement in September 2021 and the board still (still!) **has not hired** a permanent replacement. Governor Voinovich observed more than three decades ago that the State Board of Education has too much on its plate, and **the plate** has only gotten fuller since then. The time for reform is now.

The board has also become increasingly mired in **politically charged discussions** rather than attending to the important matters at-hand, namely closing learning gaps and preparing graduates for productive employment. The board’s distractions are particularly worrisome in the wake of historically **poor performance and academic decline** following the COVID school closures. And its mismanaged oversight of the Afterschool Child Enrichment Program (ACE) raises eyebrows. ACE’s \$500 education savings accounts were intentionally designed to deliver financial resources to help parents pay for tutoring and curriculum enhancements so that students can overcome some of the academic setbacks suffered during the pandemic. The State Board of Education is responsible to oversee the program and ensure that parents receive the funds. That oversight has largely failed so far, with less than 10 percent of the 250,000 students receiving the appropriated funds.

Senate Bill 178 will help address these concerns in several ways.

First, the bill trims the board’s over-extended responsibilities, redirecting its attention to the critical functions of teacher licensure and administrative issues. Second, Senate Bill 178 empowers a revamped Department of Education and Workforce to concentrate on administering programs like ACE, resolving **lingering transportation issues** across school districts, and preparing students for their futures. Third, upon enactment, the reconfigured Department of Education will be directly accountable to the governor—who can then apply the necessary pressure to the education bureaucracy to get results.

Finally, Senate Bill 178 splits the board into two divisions: one focusing on traditional K-12 education; the other focusing on students pursuing careers in technology or the trades. Wisely, each division will be run by deputy directors that sit on the Governor's Workforce Board, creating a meaningful connection between Ohio's public education system and the businesses that will be hiring its students.

I would be happy to answer any questions that the Committee might have at this time.



About The Buckeye Institute

Founded in 1989, The Buckeye Institute is an independent research and educational institution – a think tank – whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

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